if you asked me to run away i'd go easily

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if you asked me to run away i'd go easily

by madeofbees

Summary

Will has a PTSD flashback while Hannibal is away at a conference.

—

I wrote this as therapy, please be careful of triggers, esp Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (and/or CPTSD) and suicidal ideation. Stay safe <3

Notes

i actually did feel better after publishing *what are you doing to me now* for like three whole days before the depression kicked back in. so obviously i only had one recourse: part two

notes:
- please read the note at the beginning of the first story in this series bc there are triggers and also just like. i am an embarrassment & would rather not explain why again
- this part focuses on past child abuse and post traumatic stress disorder, please be very careful while reading
- i invented Will's childhood idek how much canon there is but i started with Louisiana and bayou and shitty dad and ran with it
- like maybe 3/4ths edited idk guys life is too difficult to be sure of anything
- in six hours my wife leaves for Brasil for our niece's birthday and i can't go, so i'll be home alone for three and a half weeks. i have no specific plans or ideas but i would be *shocked* if there's not a part three
- or at least more hannigram more quickly but who knows

set to *Full machine* by Gracie Abrams

i’m a roller coaster / you’re a dead end street / but won’t you stay for a while / i wish that you’d never leave

1

Will is thinking about homes. The lack of them, what it can do to people. How it’s more than just a building, it’s a foundation of security, the kind that social animals like humans need to function. Something unshakeable, somewhere to go back to, when the night was dark and full of terrors.

He thinks about the bayou, the parts of it that felt like home. Cicadas screaming through the early summer, the constant low drone of flies and mosquitos and noseeums drifting in clouds over the water, the occasional tremendous splashing and screams when an alligator struck. He’d liked the thrashing, as a child. Alligators were so patient, waiting what seemed like years for the right prey to pass by. It gave him hope, that he might one day find his own prey, instead of being his father’s.

There had been a series of cabins and rentals in Louisiana, never anything permanent. The worst times were when they were forced into an apartment complex and there were other people, sometimes other kids. He could go to school and do well, despite having missed months and at times years, without having to try. He could fake the complaining, though, around his classmates, to fit in. He could make friends. He could pretend, for short periods of time, that he had a normal life. A good life, where he was allowed to be happy and his afternoons were free and he felt like an actual kid and not a grownup stuffed into a tiny body still trying to balance the weight of the world on his stupid, prepubescent shoulders.

Then they’d have to move, again, and Will was once again alone with the cicadas.

He hears them now, singing to him as he lies on the floor, keeping time with the metronome in his head. Tick, tock, back and forth, ribs buckling one after the other-two-three-four, chirping insistently, incessantly. They’re bad this year, he thinks. More than usual.

Enough to sound like home.

But no, Louisiana had never been his home. The swamps held the appeal of quiet and safety, away from his father, yes. They were also suffocatingly humid so that breathing felt like being water boarded, and the heat would make the air over the water shimmer, like the whole place was flooding. Home to bugs that swarmed and fed on him, and the wild hogs and nutria that would burst out of the brush from nowhere, screaming in unholy wails, occasionally running straight into him—and wasn’t that fun, missing out on a beating only to get head-butted by a fucking swamp rat and knocked backwards into the river, more muck and slime than water. He’d learned to hunt them early on, because when he brought home dinner he got to eat, but that didn’t change the fact that they were sneaky bastards and he was rooting for the gators.

He did love the nighttime splashing, though, and the returning silence after the kill, while all the bugs and birds and pigs were still wondering if it was their turn next. Then the cicadas would start up again, or an owl would hoot, and the spell would be broken.

Will had learned at a young age that killing meant quiet and peace, and he wonders if that's what he needs, now, in the present, on the floor. If the only thing that will fix him is being killed. It sounds nice, like a good solution, except that he's alone and there aren't any alligators in Virginia. Just as well, he'd rather not drown. As long as he's fantasizing.

He thinks about the other places that weren't home. Drifting east along the Gulf Coast in a succession of identical vacation hotspots, because that's where the work was. Thankless work, for rich assholes who treated him like he was invisible on a good day, but enough to afford a small apartment in the bad part of town. Alligator kills were replaced by drunken tourists, not nearly enough of whom seemed to die. The apartments were better than the cabins, and the bad part of town was at least part of town, but the leases were always by the month if not the week, and as soon as a face became familiar, it disappeared, off in search of its own tropical paradise. The swamp was bad but the apartments were blank, and somehow that was worse.

Like now, Will thinks. *So I guess you really can't take the anonymous-fifth-floor-walk-up-studio out of the boy, can you?*

Virginia had felt stable, at least. College was a special sort of hell, surrounded by people just slightly younger than himself, just enough to make it weird, and he was already so weird. He'd never been around so many people so consistently, never had a roommate, never missed the peace of the bayou, but it wasn't all bad. It forced him to be present, and not much else could do that. Social interaction is beneficial even when forced, studies show. Rooms made of cement walls that smelled like old cheese and dirty socks, shoved in with his supposed peers, trying not to scream from constant overstimulation. That felt like a home of sorts. The kind he deserved, at least.

Wolf Trap was good. It *is* good, he is here, and it is home. His dogs are here and all of his things are here, and so is the carpet, soft beneath his face. Last time it had been just the wood. Hannibal is here, too, and so are his things.

Except when they aren't, like now.

The land feels like home, the snow and leaves beneath his boots so comfortingly different from Louisiana. The summers, not as much, especially for a month or so around May and June, when Washington remembers it was built on a swamp and the countryside around it bubbles and pops lazily in the burning sun like a fucking tar pit while the cicadas shriek their pleasure at his pain.

Jesus fuck seriously? What a fucking drama queen, good god. Ladies and gentlemen, what we've got ourselves here is a bonafide toddler meltdown in its natural habitat: the floor.

He sighs, closes his eyes. He hates when the voice drawls.

He thinks about homes instead.

Thinks about wood wrapped in dressing, pigs who painted up pretty but were still pigs under the makeup, the nails and boards that make up this house. Once, they had felt like a home, back when home was still a place and not a person.

A person who's gone.

Will sighs again, louder, furiously frustrated with himself. Hannibal is at a conference in New York, has been for—three days, Will is almost positive. Meaning he has two left, and then he'll be home. They've been apart far longer than this, under much worse circumstances. Will is used to being on his own. He enjoys it. He doesn't fall apart because his boyfriend is out of town.

The light is dulling, and the cicada chorus grows. The sun is setting. Two more nights of safety, and then—

What the fuck are you talking about, since when are you safer without him? He's the only reason you're still alive.

Not where the cicadas sing.

The voice doesn't have a retort for this, and he's pleased. Immediately feels worse for having felt better, and still doesn't understand what he meant.

The lecture halls are almost like a home, once he moves everything around and fixes the lights. He turns them into caves, where he can stand on a platform in front of a fire and cast shadows on the walls for the rapt students held prisoner at their desks. They never question the chains, and he never has to shove them into the light. It's familiar, at least. Or tedious.

They aren't a *home*, though. He can't retreat to their shadows when the cicadas scream in the voice of his father, telling him he's useless and that he wished he'd thrown him to the gators when he was still a baby. There's no refuge in the halls of Quantico, only foxholes where he can briefly rest before the next sprint.

Sometimes, the crime scenes felt like home. When he was drifting on the metronome, reliving someone else's life. If the killer had struck in their victims' homes, if shattering their illusion of safety was part of the thrill. He understands, deeply, the desire to not just tell but *show* the pigs how ungrateful they were, shove their face in everything they take for granted crumbling beneath them.

Like you're doing now, with your four walls and a roof.

It's not the same, Will thinks, edging on desperation. Maybe because he knows it's exactly the same, knows precisely how pathetic —*useless*—he is. His face is on a rug that costs half a year's rent, if you're willing to live in the bad part of town. Longer if you don't mind the bayou and semi-finished cabins.

The cicadas, though. He minds those.

Hannibal's home, in Baltimore. The one he's tried so hard to turn into a home for Will as well, the one Will keeps rejecting—*selfish ingrate*. He tries, he doesn't think he's ever tried to like a house more, but it's so *cold*, and all the edges are sharp, and even what was supposed to be soft, like the silk sheets on Hannibal's bed, are violent in their movements. Hannibal sees, understands without asking and fixes without speaking, replaces them with the flannel Will prefers. Then it was the duvet, and the throw blanket, and the pillows, and the throw pillows. There was always something, there.

Lately, more than anything, there has been his own guilt at having accidentally redone Hannibal's bedroom, his sanctuary, where he rests his beautiful head, to look like a fucking log cabin. He knows, in theory, he could talk to Hannibal about it. Have a conversation, like a grownup. But by the time he saw just how much of the room had changed, the cicadas were starting to hatch, and he'd gotten distracted. It was early, for cicadas.

Wolf Trap felt like guilt, too, wasn't spared just because Will lived there first. Is made worse by the fact, and by what Hannibal has done for him—*ingrate ingrate ingrate*—when he has done so little in return. His kitchen is much better stocked now, and the bedroom is as Hannibal designed (which Will likes very much, it isn't a matter of style but of his own fucked up nerve endings that can't handle anything too sharp or slippery or minimalist or maximalist or fucking *anything*). Will has asked him several times if he'd like to get a new chair for the living room, something more in keeping with his standards, and had been brushed off as silly—*stupid*. Nor does he need a desk in the study, he's happy to spend his evenings reading in the overstuffed armchair while Will grades papers and feels guilty.

The floor feels like home.

Yes, it does. And so Will stays, watches the shadows slant, wonders how he'll die this time. No hypothermia for him, just another beautiful summer night, idyllic except for the cicadas, there are just so many this year. The pantry is very well-stocked, possibly more so than the one at Hannibal's house, which makes him feel guilty. He's taken him away from his kitchen.

How dare you.

I didn't mean to, he thinks, a little less desperate. A little more numb. *It was an accident. I didn't notice.*

Yes, because you're selfish and ungrateful. Spoiled little brat. Pathetic.

Will sighs again, wincing in the darkness. The first stab of the knife, sliding true and lodging in his diagram. *No more breath for me* , he thinks, and is grateful. Would be, if he could actually die from self-hatred, and didn't need a separate means to do the dirty work.

He wonders if he could starve so close to food. If his heart insists on beating and his lungs insist on breathing, would his stomach not also insist on eating? Drag him to the kitchen against his will and force feed him?

In the battle for Will Graham's soul, who will win: Starvation and its sidekick Too Weak to Eat, or the returning favorite, Survival Instinct? Find out tonight, on pay-per-view television!

The crowd, made up entirely of cicadas, screams their approval.

Fuck, guess I'm going crazy for real this time, he thinks, somewhat amused. *Good for me, I deserve it.*

You deserve nothing.

Another sigh, wrenched from deep within, aggravating the knife. Right. Of course. He'd forgotten.

Will tries to remember the last time he went to work. He had lectured for sure on Monday and was leaning towards Tuesday as well, but could he have really slid so far so fast? Hannibal left in the early hours of Monday morning, and Will had been—a little quiet, maybe, a little sullen, obviously not enough to have been concerning. If Hannibal has been gone for three days, that probably makes this Wednesday. Or Thursday, if he'd been gone for three nights. He'll be home so late on Friday that it's really Saturday, only to find Will dead on the carpet.

He feels a lurch of panic at this, of Hannibal being the one to find his body. On his carpet, designed specifically to prevent this. He should move somewhere less sacred, even if it was just the small strip of wooden floor between the rug and the fireplace. He thinks he'd fit, if only just. Not enough that his putrefaction wouldn't drip onto the carpet and make a mess.

How're you gonna do it, Will? the voice asks. *Gonna have to be a little more proactive this time, there's no death by passivity in early June. You don't have time to starve yourself. You'll have to do something.*

The voice sounds gleeful. Will thinks that's cruel, but he doesn't disagree with anything it says, and thus doesn't bother mounting a defense. He won't freeze to death, the temperature is quite nice now that the sun is down. He won't overheat during the day, it isn't *that* hot, not unless he purposefully overexerted himself, and that was funny, having energy to exert. He doesn't have time to dehydrate, either, even though he suspects he may have gotten a head start on that one, given how dry his mouth is. There are no wild animals to wander in, the dogs make sure of that. They have food and water, The Dogs Come First.

This patch of floor, Will thinks, *is not nearly deadly enough.* With the carpet and its thick pad, it's actually relatively comfortable.

Disgusting.

Yes. Will wants to fix it, be anywhere in his house other than laid out on this five by seven foot rectangle, but. He is—*pathetic useless worthless sack of shit*—as incapable of movement as last time, and will indeed apparently drown on the sunlight meant to keep him afloat.

Hannibal will blame himself.

He sighs again, a low *boof* that sounds more dog than person. There's no question, no way of arguing with an objective truth. Whether he's on the rug or not, takes a handful of pills or eats his gun, Hannibal will most certainly take his absence as proof of liability.

You can't hurt him. You cannot turn a temper tantrum over your own mistakes into another wound that won't fully heal. You have hurt him so much, why would you do so again? I thought you loved him.

The knife twists deeper, and he realizes he's crying, silently and almost cinematically, on his designer rug in his faded striped boxers, a contradiction befitting some arthouse melodrama while a moody Chopin concerto plays in ever-swelling minor keys, culminating at the moment of his death.

Death by what, asshole.

A knife would be dramatic, and he has his choice from Hannibal's knife block. It would make a statement, spilling his blood onto his lifeline. Hannibal would be devastated. Part of him likes this idea, cradles it carefully, like a newborn. Being something worth devastation.

Pathetic, he thinks. *Selfish. Horrible.*

Yes. And that's a different kind of comfort, knowing he isn't worth shit, that he has no choice but to end his miserable existence. It might hurt, at first, but it's terribly rude, bleeding out on someone else's carpet, and Hannibal will see that soon enough. Inevitably realize that Will has done him a tremendous favor, and move on. Buy rugs for other people, better people, who would never stain such a precious gift.

There are guns, in this house. Will's service weapon, and his backup. Hannibal has a small collection but Will would never involve them in this. Nothing that could implicate Hannibal; either direct suspicion or a routine check turning up more bodies connected to the rifling pattern. He doesn't know if there are more bodies, Hannibal prefers to kill up close and personal, but mistakes happen.

Mistakes like you.

Yes, he thinks. *Except I am his biggest and only real mistake.*

A gun, his own gun, would fix that. He'd have to get up, get it from the drawer next to the bed where it lives. Go somewhere other than here, and other than Hannibal's room. He would see it as an attack, and Will could not be less predator if he tried. He has no attack left in him for anyone, and would die before hurting Hannibal.

Then why are you planning his misery, how is this his design?

Will isn't sure. Pushes the thought away. His study is as good a place as any. Typical for an adult male suicide by gun. Usually there was a reason, open files on the desk, a looming deadline, some business dealings ready to collapse. Eating his gun where he worked implied a connection to work, and Will can't risk that. He's sure Hannibal wouldn't let himself get caught just because Will is too tired to exist, but he wants it to be as painless as possible. A smooth transition, the kind Hannibal had denied Bella Crawford, back then.

The main benefit of the gun, especially combined with a hastily penned note about how loud the voices were, especially at night, when they scream like cicadas, never ending, stealing his

sleep and leaving him collapsed on the floor, is that there would be no question. *Will Graham killed himself, sure he did, hadn't you heard? Blew his pretty, clever brains all over the wall. What a shame. Can't say I'm surprised, though. He was always a little weird.*

It would be such a normal death. He doesn't deserve something so simple. So anticlimactic.

Do you think you deserve a spectacle? That's so sad, Will. Pathetic. You need a pathetic death, not normal, but don't you dare think that means extraordinary. Cardiac arrest on the toilet, say. Will finally leaves the building.

This, Will thinks, is a remarkably good point. Rules out nearly every method of suicide, though.

I could fall off a ladder and break my back.

No, you'd just screw it up and end up paralyzed so he has to wait on you hand and foot for the rest of his life. How fucking dare you.

He sighs, and settles into the carpet pile and padded mat and thinks, *this is too good for me. And I am too tired to move. Fuck.*

Maybe he needs a nap. Not because he deserves the relief of sleep, but because then he might have the energy to come up with a halfway decent plan.

Unlikely.

Yes, right, he was pathetic and useless and ungrateful, too stupid to kill himself, fine. He is also tired, and the floor is soft this time. Feels like a friend he doesn't deserve. The cicadas have been screaming for days, weeks, maybe years, he can't remember the last time he slept through the night, hadn't woken shaking and sweaty with their ringing echoes weaving dream and reality together into something too complicated to ever untangle.

Just a little nap, Will thinks, feeling his already closed eyelids grow heavier. *So I can do it right.*

He drifts, and then he sleeps.

2

Will is in Louisiana. He has come home. He wants it to feel like vengeance, like Sunny in that 90s ballad. He wants to send fireballs flying across the swamp, turn today's cabin into ash and see how his dad likes that. He wants to celebrate one last Fourth of July with the old man, and then dismember him in a beautiful display of red arterial spurts and pink mist.

He cannot do any of those things.

He sits under a cypress tree, leaning back against it, panting lightly. He can't hold himself up, he has no strength, no capabilities. He can't run. He knows he must, knows he can't. He might possibly be able to drag himself through the boggy marsh, given three hundred

thousand years to cross the ten feet that make up the barely moving stream he's steeping in. He would not be given the time.

The cicadas sing around him like a lullaby, keeping his body soft and useless. He needs to leave. He cannot.

He hears rustling, tries to look in that direction but can't turn his head. It's too small to be his father, probably just some nutria looking for a drink. Unless it was dangerous, rabid, deep in rut, unless it wasn't a nutria but a wild hog, unless he was about to be gored to death.

No, he thinks desperately. Can't open his mouth to scream for help, and just as well, there's no help to be had.

A hog walks out of the bush. It's huge, the size of a hulking grizzly bear, and it regards him with shiny mirror eyes. Will can't breathe, the humidity makes it worse but the incredible terror that emanated from the hog will suffocate him just as well.

I won't hurt you, Will begs silently. Is too tired to voice the words. *I don't have a weapon. I can't move. Please don't hurt me.*

The hog opens its mouth. Clouds of cicadas fly out, swarming and bumping into Will's bare skin, startling aborted little grunts of terror. They are screaming, enveloping him, and he is going to die, when the hog speaks.

"No. He is mine."

Will moans in helpless horror as the cicadas heed the voice of their God, one who speaks with the same broken, collapsing ribs chirp that is their call. They retreat, settle into the trees around him. There is no other wildlife, only the hog and the cicadas. No life at all.

The hog, now easily the size of an elephant, walks to Will. His stride doesn't disturb the water, has no affect on his environment at all. The universe moves around him, makes room for his lurking presence without thought. Will sees. The nature of the beast, its naturalness, how it fits perfectly in this world, one with the universe.

An Old God, readying the slaughter of the pretender to his throne.

"It was always going to be this way," the hog says.

Will manages a single nod. He knows.

"Alright, then," his father says, raises his shotgun to his shoulder, Will held safely in its crosshairs. His voice is distorted by the cicadas in his throat, an insectile purr like nails on a chalkboard. The hog isn't gone, has just taken another form. Will sees no discernible difference between the two. He is not afraid of the shotgun; he is more afraid of staying alive and aware in the swamp. Death is so much more pleasurable than the constant, beating *doom doom doom* of his heart.

Do it, Will mouths. Cannot force sound through his vocal cords. *Kill me. Please.*

The cloud of cicadas smile cruelly at him. *" You'll wish you never said that."* They were on him, burying into his skin, vibrating with their echoing shriek, and Will finds he can make sound after all. He can scream.

He screams and screams and screams.

3

Will doesn't recognize the sound that wakes him. Somebody is dying, he thinks, an agonized death rattle echoing—*echoing*—in his living room. His throat hurts, he can't breathe. He is making the noise, strangling screams, and thinks that makes sense, of course he's dying, what else would he be doing?

He stops. With a great deal of effort, he forces himself quiet. Thinks correctly that he's scaring himself, and he'll be able to think more clearly when it's quiet.

His cheek stings. He is sitting up. He is in pain. He is on the floor. His ears are ringing, indistinguishable from the cicadas outside. Inside? Probably, the bloom this year was concerning all the biologists and entomologists and climatologists. It was probable one or two had gotten in. Laid eggs. Were multiplying.

He curls, bringing his knees up to his chest and wrapping his arms around his legs in a futile attempt to escape the insects. His head is pounding with their song, he wants to slam his head against the wall until it stops. Smack the bottom of the jar until the last few cicadas shake free.

Why is his cheek stinging? Cicadas didn't sting or bite, did they? Maybe, in the nightmare swamp that keeps shimmering in and out of existence around him. He is in his living room, sitting on his rug, stagnant water up to his chest and knees, cypress trees blooming up from the bayou like overeager sunflowers.

The cicadas speak, and Will moans pitifully as they say his name, over and over, like a taunt. *Will are you there Will Will is that you is that our Will our poor pathetic homeless Will who has never left the bayou Will who has never left us Will who will never be allowed to leave us Will whose only home is the scream of the cicadas Will do you see Will do you do you Will Will* ***Will do you see***

"Leave me alone," he whispers. Doesn't like talking. Doesn't want the cicadas invading the warm, wet, dark cave of his mouth and laying eggs in his teeth.

"*Will*."

He frowns. That doesn't sound like the bayou. It does sound like home, though. Maybe he hadn't left the swamps at all, had hallucinated the rest of his life and was back in the marsh, ten years old and shaking in terror that his father would find him before the gators or grizzlies, and yes he was far too old to believe the rumors about bears in the swamps, but what if.

The cicadas sing harmony: *what if what if what if*.

Hadn't he been trying to die? Shouldn't he embrace his childhood monsters as they tear him to pieces, give thanks for their mercy? But there aren't any bears, and cicadas don't kill people, not even *pathetic useless ingrates* like him.

It's almost a shame. Becoming one in a chorus of hundreds of millions sounds acceptable. Faceless, anonymous. Part of something greater than himself.

"*Come back to me, beautiful boy.*"

Something greater. That was greater, that voice. The one that didn't sound like the bayou at all. The one trying to shatter him alive. There's a different sort of terror with this voice, like forgotten consequences. Dinner left too long in the oven setting off smoke alarms. Something soft, they were soft words, weren't they.

Soft kills, he thinks, doesn't know what he means. He's still sitting up, and it's becoming exhausting. He wants to lie back down but can't quite parse which direction to move which limbs to achieve this goal, so he doesn't try. Leans the side of his face on his knees and looks at the empty fireplace nestled in the roots of a nearby cypress tree. It feels wrong, it's fine. He's too tired to care.

"My love, what happened?"

A cicada lands on his shoulder. He flinches away from it and somehow summons more; they swarm his shoulders and back, pushing their tiny bodies into his flesh, and he lets out a wretched moan. He can't hear himself, their song is so loud now, that they've finally descended onto him. The feast will begin momentarily.

The first man to be eaten alive by cicadas, Will muses. Is that pathetic enough? Not mundane or ordinary, but certainly not normal. Disgusting, because who lets themselves be eaten alive by a swarm of vegetarians? How could he stay so still while they feasted? Who could possibly hate themselves so much as to allow such a thing? Why didn't he *move*?

A twisted, miserable smile twists across his face. It's perfect. All he has to do is nothing, and he'll go down in the annals of history as that crazy guy who was eaten alive by bugs, right at the height of his career, guess he couldn't take the pressure, what a pitiful creature.

Yes good, that's me, one pathetic creature right here. He pauses, runs back through his thoughts. *Pitiful. One pitiful creature.*

Pathetic is one of his father's favorite words, along with useless, ingrate, mistake. He has so many favorites. Will tries not to use them.

He thinks he hears the rug apologizing, which. Deserves closer investigation, that's not what rugs do. He starts to consider this when something tangles in his hair and yanks his head back. He yelps, screams, clawing at the cicadas or the vines or the roots of the cypress trees, whatever is dragging him backwards, no doubt into the water to drown him.

Alligators with hands, he thinks wildly. *Oh fuck, the alligators have hands now. Watch out.*

It's not funny. He's still trapped, held in place by reptilian hands, and a giggle slips out. *Alligators with hands. Hope that's mundane enough for you, Will. Ready for the death roll?*

He laughs again. The fingers in his hair—*alligator fingers*—loosen, and as he descends into hysteria, he also manages to break free. Slip away.

He tries, at least.

His body is stiff and waterlogged from his stay at the cicada tree. Cypress tree. His joints aren't responsive, his muscles are riddled with glass shards—*cicada eggs*, his brain not-so-helpfully fills in. Oh god, he will die like this, and it will be *so bad*. He wonders when he'll start to bleed, what will go first. His ears, nose, mouth, eyes. Where the baby cicadas will start eating him alive.

Maggots, he thinks. *That's what baby cicadas are. Little wood nymphs with little legs and little exoskeletons they shed as they grow. You'll be more dead bone-skin than dead human.*

This thought is so viscerally horrific that he stops laughing. His ears ring in the silence, or maybe that's the cicadas burrowing tunnels in his brain. His vision swims, and he's back in crime scene photographs, the ones Katz brought him when he was in prison. Katherine Pimm's victims, filled with hives and honey. At least they would have tasted good, marinated in honey. He's got nothing but stagnant bog water to enhance the natural flavor of shedded cicada skin.

He's going to throw up. He would let himself, except he's still on the rug, he's pretty sure. In the bayou, on the rug. And he doesn't want to get vomit on the rug, that would be so so terribly unforgivably rude, even if it's already sopping with swamp water. Absolutely not.

He tries to move, remembers he's freed himself, remembers again that he can't, his body won't let him. He appreciates the dedication to death, would still rather not be drowned by an alligator with people hands who spoke like a cicada and—

It hadn't, actually. There are cicadas everywhere on every surface, there are cicadas in his ears and skin and blood and brain, there are cicadas disguised as his father, or the other way around. But he'd dismissed the hold on his hair as *not* cicadas, because cicadas don't have hands. Or they do, but they're tiny and bug-like. They can do many things to him, but they cannot grab him and haul him up by his hair.

Dad could.

Will swallows. He could, it's true. He did, all the time. Will had kept his hair short as a child, too short for grabbing. He let it grow when he moved out, mostly because he couldn't afford regular trips to the barber shop, discovered it was one of the few things he didn't mind about his appearance. Soft, gentle curls, forming something of a barrier between himself and the rest of the world, especially when he got lazy and skipped a trim. Nothing about him felt soft or gentle, so it's really no surprise that his dad would pinpoint the one weakness Will couldn't weaponize to use against him.

Hannibal likes his hair long too, he thinks.

Hannibal has hands, and he isn't an alligator.

Yes, but Hannibal was hours away in New York, a thousand miles from the bayou. He is not here, and that is dangerous thinking.

More dangerous than cicadas eating your brain?

Will doesn't know, is no longer sure of what was supposed to be dangerous, other than the cicadas.

"Please forgive me," the rug says.

Would you shut up already, Will thinks tiredly, and then he is attacked. He lets out a startled cry, tries to jerk away from the alligator hands in his hair and the heavy vines draped over him and the cicadas screaming from everywhere surrounding him denying any existence but theirs. He is stung, deeply, in the meat of his neck. He tries to grab at it, crush the bug into nothing, let it drain back into the swamp, but he is restrained. He screams again, tries to break free, finds his limbs alarmingly heavy.

Cicadas aren't poisonous, he thinks, and then his vision goes black. For a while, he isn't anywhere at all.

4

The first thing Will registers is the sound of cicadas. He groans, tries to cover his ears, can't move. His body feels heavy. So does his mind. He wants to open his eyes, because he isn't certain where he is, or why, but his eyelids are heavy, too. He feels drugged.

Poisoned.

He frowns, slightly. As much as he can. Why would he be poisoned? By whom?

Does it matter? Didn't you want to die anyway? Maybe this is the universe tossing you a freebie.

Maybe. But.

The floor is soft and comfortable, especially beneath his aching head. He isn't dressed but he is warm, there's fabric on him. Blankets and a bed, maybe, but that doesn't seem like something a killer would do. Definitely not something he wants or deserves. He wants the floor. He wants to go home.

You don't have a home. Could I interest you in a swamp?

The cicada song swells around him. Right. Yes. The bayou found him.

I have to leave.

Will forces his eyes open. The room is dark. He is in a bed. There is a window to the right that he resolutely refuses to look out of, he doesn't want to know how far he is from the

bayou, doesn't want to state into its unblinking murkiness. He is in a familiar room, though he isn't sure which. He tries to raise an arm, is met with sharp pain.

There is an IV in my hand.

Is it a hospital room, then? For the poisoning? Or is this the poisoning, is it ongoing, does he need to be rescued?

Or just close your eyes and go back to sleep, since that's what you wanted.

It was. It is, it still is, it's just he'd like to know who kidnapped him. And why, what about him exactly was worth kidnapping, if he was being ungrateful. Pathetic. If the whole thing was just a mistake.

An accidental kidnapping? Oh, Will. What a perfectly mundane way to die. I'm so proud of you.

He huffs a laugh. It would be quite the accomplishment.

From somewhere deeper in the house, he hears a toilet flush. It's all so mundane, he starts giggling. Remembers his hysteria from earlier, laughs harder. It's all so fucking stupid, pathetic, and he's so goddamn *ungrateful* for the very real home around him, and *stupid*, having a full-on mental break just because some bugs have overactive tymbal structures. He should be scaring himself, scared by what was around him, but even that made him laugh harder, tears pouring out of his eyes, stomach aching and cramping.

"Will?"

He stops abruptly. Turns to the voice. To Hannibal, standing in the doorway of their room, looking more frightened than Will has ever seen. He wants to luxuriate in the idea of scaring him so completely, but he just feels the bottomless pit of guilt open wider, swallow more of himself.

He's supposed to be in New York. Is it Friday? He must hate me. Fuck.

"Am I in Louisiana or Virginia?" he asks. The laughter left so suddenly he is imploded, collapsed, has no room for shame, so he's honest. Why not. Adds a few more guesses. "New York, Maryland?"

Hannibal studies him, stays in the doorway. Is he afraid *of* him as well? Will feels his heartbeat for the first time in days.

Or he's afraid that whatever you've got is contagious. Or it's the reek of the swamp, dead things rotting in the sun, how it gets into your hair, under your nails, and you smell just as fetid.

All good points, he denies none of the charges.

"Virginia," Hannibal says at last, and Will nods, it was his best guess. He wouldn't have gone back to the bayou willingly under any circumstances; the fact that it found him so far north is

a great disappointment. He can still hear the cicadas, still see marsh as easily as house. It was all so very slippery, like the sheets Will hated, because he is ungrateful and will always be.

“What’s in the IV?” he asks, because maybe if he knows, it’ll look more like medical equipment and less like the bite of a small but determined insect.

“Saline, nutrients, electrolytes,” Hannibal says easily. Too easily. He sounds like a doctor. “A low dose of muscle relaxant to help with the pain. How is it?”

“Fine,” Will says, not having any idea about the pain, all of his focus on getting rid of Doctor Lecter. “And the, um.” His eyes were so dark, nothing like an alligator, who might as well have two flashlights strapped to the side of its head.

Like a grizzly bear?

He swallows. Doesn’t know. Hasn’t ever seen one. But it sounds right.

Finish your sentence before he sees that you know.

Crazy person logic, but he was crazy, so that tracked.

“The shot?” he asks. Assuming there was no cicada bite on his neck, that Hannibal had drugged him. It wouldn’t be the first time.

“A sedative,” Hannibal says. “You gave me no choice.”

Will nods again, watching objectively as he tears himself apart. *Ingrate. Pathetic. Mistake. He’s going to leave. He ought to leave, with the way you’re acting. Look at yourself.*

“Sorry,” he mutters. Hannibal looks incredulous, and he flushes, looks away. Doesn’t want to be here anymore. Remembers why the bayou could be home, when he has no other options. Because he has no other options. “I’m sorry, really. Are you home early? I didn’t mean to make you leave early.”

So many more words than he’d expected, most of them unnecessary. He hadn’t done anything to worry Hannibal, he was sure. In addition to The Dogs Come First, a new rule had formed over the past six months: Do Not Worry Hannibal. He thinks he might have forgotten that rule, a little bit, since he’s been home. But he is *positive* that whatever communication they shared while he was in New York had been sane. He couldn’t have made him leave early.

“It’s Thursday,” Hannibal says, and he sounds oddly toneless. Like he doesn’t really care. The knife is back. Will had forgotten, in the Louisiana heat, but it’s still there, he’s still been stabbed, stabbed himself. Twists it now, because he can. “The conference was largely over, I didn’t miss much.”

This is a lie; the keynote speaker wasn’t giving the address until Friday afternoon, followed by a reception and dinner. Hannibal had said it would be rude if he left early; this is why his return flight was so late.

Will has made Hannibal be rude.

He removes the knife. Slams it back in. Shreds his diaphragm like Hannibal shreds their dinner. He has failed. Is still failing, right now, in this moment. He is ungrateful. He is pathetic. He is useless.

“I’m sorry,” he says again, much more quietly. “I’m okay, you—”

“Don’t lie to me.”

His words are sharp, clipped. Will hears cicadas in his speech. He wants to cower; instead he makes it worse.

“Tell me again about the keynote speaker,” he retorts.

Hannibal is unfazed, says nothing. He is angry, Will saw that correctly, and he shatters. Begins the slow process of shattering. He has broken his rule, he must be punished. Whatever Hannibal says or does won’t be enough. Other plans will have to be made.

“I didn’t lie,” Will says, because it’s true. Because it was a fucking war and he’d won.

“You didn’t tell me the truth,” Hannibal counters, and that is also true.

However.

Hannibal shouldn’t have any way of knowing that.

“Were you spying on me?” Will asks, but it should be an accusation, and it isn’t. He kind of likes the idea. He definitely doesn’t deserve it, he’s not very interesting at all, just lies around all day. Ha, ha.

“Yes,” Hannibal replies just as calmly. “There’s a mat underneath the rug, I get a text if the weight sensors are engaged but haven’t detected movement in over an hour. There’s a small camera in the bookcase that I can check remotely. The dogs trigger it, on occasion. Especially when there’s a fire.”

Will tries to process this information. He doesn’t know how. His head hurts, and he’s tired, and the cicadas are fucking *shrieking* at him, and it’s all too much.

And you disappointed Hannibal, and now he’s mad at you, don’t forget that.

Yes, that too. That most of all.

He lies back down, thinks he doesn’t deserve the comfort of a bed, knows he’ll never be able to get away with the floor again. He could try a different part of the house, but Hannibal would just wire the whole place if he hadn’t already. The IV tugs on his hand as he moves, and he winces slightly. Wonders when it’ll go back to being bugs. Fuck he’s tired.

“I’d like to sleep now,” he says, hears how flat his voice is, sighs inaudibly. No chance of fooling Hannibal this time.

“If you’d like,” he says, shocking Will into looking at him. “We can talk in the morning.”

“I don’t want to talk,” he says pointlessly.

“Do you want to kill yourself?” Hannibal asks in the same neutral tones he’d use to describe the weather. It’s something Doctor Lecter does.

“On and off,” Will replies honestly, cattily. Hannibal’s gaze sharpens, and he gives up. “Not this precise second. Earlier.” Silence spins out between them, but it isn’t silent, it’s filled with cicadas. “Later, again, probably. I don’t know. I won’t, though.” It’s true, he’s too pathetically weak for Hannibal, would never dream of disrespecting the honor of his presence with such a pointed rejection.

You sound like an idiot.

I am an idiot, Will thinks, irritated. *Shut up.*

“I don’t think that was as reassuring as you meant it to be,” Hannibal says. His voice is still light; Will is paralyzed waiting for the dark. “But yes, of course you can sleep. Rest is good for you. Would you like me to remove the IV?”

Will scoffs. “You trust me that much?”

“I trust the bag is empty, your body has accepted the water, nutrients, and medications, and that I will not leave your side,” Hannibal says, finally walking into the room, *finally* . It feels more like a room and less like a swamp when he’s in it. He goes to the other side of the bed, between Will and the window, takes his hand, starts talking.

Will doesn’t hear it.

He doesn’t hear anything under the thundering cicadas.

The window is open. He closes the windows when the cicadas are blooming, all of them, compulsively and without thought. He always has. The window should be closed, it is not closed. It’s open, and this is how the bayou grows. Moss paints the windowsill, the nearby walls. Vines twist out in all directions, exploring their new environment. He hears hogs shrieking in the not-very-distance, nutria sprinting through the bushes. The smell of still water, rotting waterlogged corpses, how even the bugs had their own smell, especially the noseeums and the cicadas. There are no signs of alligators, the closest he has to an ally in this world.

I am home, he thinks, and starts crying. He can barely tell the difference between the humidity and his tears. *I don’t want this to be my home, but it is. I never did get out after all.*

Right where you belong.

“Will?”

Hannibal’s voice is very far away, but it’s there. He can’t see him, precisely, in the shifting darkness, but it’s a comfort to know that he’s here.

Is It? Or does it mean the cicadas have access to him as well? Have they burrowed into his *brain, are they once again running the show? Have they eaten everything you love? Is everything gone but the screaming of the cicadas?*

…no. Will is pretty sure. Because Hannibal said his name, and it was Hannibal, and not cicadas. Probably.

Jesus fuck this is exhausting. I just want to sleep.

"Are you with me?"

He closes his eyes. The open window vanishes. He nods. "Yes, I'm here," he lies. *In the swamp, where I belong.*

"What's wrong?"

He's so tired. Drifting already. Wonders if Hannibal left the IV in after all, gave him another dose of sedative. He can't tell if there's a cicada on his hand—from the open window—or an IV or a bandage, it's all the same.

"Window," he mumbles, tries to curl up on his side, away from the hole in his house that used to feel like home before this invasion. There's a sharp pain in his hand, and a hand closes around his wrist, preventing him from pulling at it. He grumbles, something upset and half-conscious.

"Do you want me to close the window?"

He sags in relief, nods. The hand squeezes once, reassuringly, and is withdrawn. The swollen wood sounds like cicadas when forced to move, but then it's done and he hears the click of the lock and the quiet *whoosh* of the curtain, and then it is so much better, so much quieter. He'd like to check the curtains, and perhaps the blankets as well, for any signs of infestation, but realistically it was more likely that a family of earwigs or ants have made their home in his, and he can't bring himself to care. They're quiet, they can stay.

"Sleep, my love." A warm hand brushes over his forehead and he turns to it, towards Hannibal and the IV, and then he can curl up properly and does, with Hannibal's hand on his head and the cicadas' muffled song. "I'll be here when you wake."

Will you, though? Or have I driven you away with my ungrateful, pathetic uselessness? How selfish do I have to be before you get the point, that I'm not worth all of this? Any of it?

He doesn't know, but he can still feel Hannibal stroking his hair, and lets himself be lulled into sleep.

i almost lost it / i'll heal eventually / but faster if you're next to me / next to me

Chapter Summary

Home from the conference, Hannibal helps Will find his own way back home.

5

The first thing Will does when he wakes up is to take the IV out of his hand. He doesn't know what he's been given or how much or for how long, doesn't know the day or the time, but that's twice now that Hannibal has drugged him, and doesn't want it. Doesn't deserve the comfort of sedation.

Hannibal is asleep next to him, sitting up and fully dressed, head tipped forward and resting on his chest, his book closed on a finger on his lap.

Will stutters.

The cicadas—they've been loud this year—quiet. He forgets what he was doing. He forgets about the bayou. He forgets.

He loves to watch Hannibal sleep, watch the lines of his face smooth out, his posture soften, the constant control over his every movement and every stillness slip away. He is never at rest the way he is when he sleeps, and Will has thought about saying something a hundred times, keeps thinking it might break the spell somehow, and he can't risk it. Hannibal's peace restores him the way the love between God and Jesus manifests as the Holy Spirit. He is cleansed, restored, by bathing in Hannibal's serenity.

Before this, he had found absolution.

Now he is crushed under the weight of everything he has done, everything he is still doing, because the goddamn cicadas are still singing and as long as they're here, he won't be. Not fully. He isn't even sure how lucid he is now, really wishes he knew.

What if you're hallucinating? the voice asked. *What if you're alone after all? What if he didn't come back? A motion detector sounds awfully convenient, doesn't it. Like something a failing mind might invent in a last-ditch effort at sanity.*

The thought is terrifying, worse than the cicadas. Hand shaking, still bleeding slightly, he touches the back of Hannibal's hand.

Hannibal jerks beneath him and he withdraws immediately, pushing himself away, against the edge of the bed. His eyes are wide and terrified, like he's trapped by a grizzly bear and not in bed with his Hannibal. It's just. If he is still his.

Hannibal looks frantic for almost less time than Will can register, and then he calms. Takes in Will's appearance, and he feels himself being observed, sitting on a golden scale and awaiting judgment. His heart his pounding, he's not sure if he can survive Hannibal's judgment.

You woke him up, you asshole.

You woke me up, you asshole.

The words are perfectly layered, he hears or thinks only one sentence, one thought. Flinches away from it.

"You're awake," Hannibal says pointlessly. Will thinks it must be a test, but he doesn't know the answer. Only wants to please him, and stays silent when he knows he can't. Hannibal frowns, and he wants to die, drain into the bog water under the bed. "Are you awake?"

"Yes," he says quickly, almost on top of Hannibal's words. He winces again, draws further into himself. Tries to get the worst over with. "I took out the IV. I'm sorry."

"That's alright," Hannibal says carefully, like Will might shatter. Silly of him; he was already in pieces on the floor. "Have you been up long?"

Will shakes his head. "No. Just now."

Hannibal nods slightly, and Will relaxes, just a little. He hasn't done anything wrong. Yet. Again, actually, and then yet. They'll have to talk about it. He doesn't think he can, doesn't think his body will allow him those words. But he wants to please Hannibal so badly, to make up for everything he's done and hasn't done, fix himself so he can be good enough.

"Did you—good sleep?" he asks, shrivels at his inability to form a sentence. And stupidity; obviously he hadn't, otherwise he'd be lying down.

"Good enough," Hannibal says, and Will still hears the caution, like he's a wild animal who might lash out at the slightest provocation.

Aren't you?

He doesn't know. He doesn't want to be. He is too tired to be so violent, too unmoored to find his true target.

"Do you know where you are?" Doctor Lecter asks, and Will wants to die.

"Virginia," he says colorlessly. "Wolf Trap." And the bayou, but he wants the doctor gone, wants to be back with his Hannibal.

Like he's really yours.

The knife, which had never been removed at all, twists painfully.

“Good,” Hannibal says, and he basks in the praise, even if he’s only parroting back what he’d been told. Even if it’s from his doctor. “What about the day?”

Will shakes his head again, twists the knife again. “I don’t know. I think you said Thursday. Maybe it’s still Thursday.” His words sound like nothing. Good. No pain slipping out, keeping it all inside where he can only hurt himself.

“You slept for quite some time,” Hannibal says, sounding—evasive? If it’s because of the drugs, Will doesn’t care. Hannibal can do whatever he wants with him, as long as he keeps the fucking window shut so the cicadas won’t get in. “I kept you hydrated and fed, intravenously.”

Of course he had, that was never the question. “Not Thursday?” Will asks instead.

“Friday night,” Hannibal allows, looking guilty. Will doesn’t know why. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine,” he says automatically, then remembers his rule: Do Not Upset Hannibal. Lying upsets him. “I don’t know. Tired. Scared.” Fuck, not that one. “The cicadas are loud.”

Hannibal’s eyes refocus and Will feels himself being searched like a database, enjoys the way Hannibal thumbs through his insides. “Thank you for being honest,” he says eventually, withdrawing. The loss is catastrophic. Will wants his fingers back. “Is that why you wanted me to close the windows? Because of the cicadas?”

Will nods, says again, “They’re loud this year.”

He watches Hannibal understand, and while he wants to be humiliated—*pathetic and useless and ungrateful*—he only feels relief, a tsunami washing over him and pulling him back out to sea, reborn in salt water where the cicadas didn’t dare follow. He doesn’t need to talk, Hannibal knows. What he will do with that information, Will can only guess. Try and manage his expectations.

Ingrate.

“What do you see now?” Hannibal asks gently. He thinks it’s Hannibal, can’t be certain. “Are we in the bayou still?”

He doesn’t know, doesn’t want to know. “It’s close,” he says instead. Wants to ask who he’s in bed with. Can’t.

“Do you know who I am?”

The knife is so deep, he can’t breathe. The accusation so stunningly cruel, that he might ever not know. And accurate, because hadn’t he been convinced he was an alligator? Or a bear? It’s hazy now, and he’d rather keep it that way.

“Yes,” he whispers.

Do you?

“H-Hannibal.” He hates the stutter in his voice, despises it, can’t look at the man. “As opposed to Doctor Lecter.”

“Very good,” Hannibal says with such warmth in his voice that Will can’t help but sneak a glance at him. He’s smiling now, the concern momentarily pushed aside. He looks like gold. Like the sun.

Careful. Sun burns are the leading cause of skin cancer.

“Shut up,” he whispers, and Hannibal raises his eyebrows. Will blushes, looks away. “Not—not you. Sorry.”

“Who else is here with us?” Hannibal asks, and he doesn’t sound surprised, or alarmed, or disgusted. He only sounds like he wants to know so he can help.

“Cicadas,” he says, he can’t help it, he is full of them and now there’s one less, expelled from him by naming it. “The swamp, mostly. And the cicadas.” No relief the second time, must’ve been beginners luck.

“Any other people?”

He sounds more doctorly. Will hates his tone and his question, gives him as little as he can in return. “No.”

“What do you need?”

He’s thrown. Was that a medical question, does he need sleep, food, medication, therapy? Or is it Hannibal asking how he can help? He doesn’t know.

“I—.” He stops. Tries to take deep, regular breaths that smell like Hannibal and not heavy swamp air. God, the cicadas are *so loud* tonight. “Can you hear them, too?” he asks, almost desperately. Meets Hannibal’s concerned eyes. Golden, still. Warm. Possibly safe. “The cicadas?”

“Yes, though I don’t think they’re as loud for me as they are for you,” Hannibal says, and Will breathes a little easier. At least they’re real. If they have to be here, he’d rather they be outside his head than in. Admits that he’d probably have more signs of brain damage if there were, in fact, cicada nymphs in his brain. “I wasn’t aware you had an aversion. Were there many in the bayou?”

Again, Will doesn’t know why he bothers asking. Obviously there were. He is on edge, on the edge of the bed, on the edge of panic, of the bayou, of the bottomless crevasse of depression. He’s lucid enough to know they really are the only people here, that his father is dead and buried back in Louisiana. Another reason it doesn’t feel like home; his father is interred, has infected already putrid land-water.

“I want to go away,” Will says. He has no direction, doesn’t know what he means, but the way Hannibal’s eyes lock on his, the *focus*, he thinks there might be one. An overgrown path

leading… away. Somewhere else. Somewhere quieter. He should say more words, try to feel out whatever Hannibal wants from him, but the *weight* of his intensity makes it so hard to think.

“Yes,” Hannibal says. “Anywhere you’d like. We can leave tonight, and never look back.”

Will laughs, surprising himself. It’s more nervous than amused, and he can’t tell if the air is sparking with potential or unease. Danger. “Han, I wasn’t—”

“Why not?” he interrupts, and as quiet as his words are, they’re so *real*, the realest thing he’s heard since Hannibal had left Monday morning. “You are miserable here, the way Jack Crawford pushes you, makes you perform like you’re his puppet.” The fury in his words shocks Will, sends arousal spiraling up his spine. He knows, of course, about Hannibal’s displeasure at his working conditions, but hearing it like this, like he would rip Jack to pieces if he were here. “You can teach, or work on boats, or anything else you’d like, anywhere in the world. You don’t have to be subject to his degradations and demands. You don’t have to live in a swamp, you don’t need to be anywhere your past feels present. We can disappear, Will. No one will be able to find you, not even the ghosts. You’ll be free.”

Will is—

Fuck.

He’s floating, he isn’t real, he isn’t here, he isn’t—

He is everything and nothing and can’t breathe and his heart has stopped and it’s quiet, completely silent, except for the beating of Hannibal’s heart. No cicadas. Nothing. There is—

“Yes,” he says. There is *yes*. There is them. And there is nothing else.

Hannibal glows. Brightens until he really is the sun, dazzling and blinding Will in his stardust. He’s buzzing like a looming thunderstorm, crackling the air around them with static potential. Will feels like he’s going to combust.

What if he fucked you right now? Would you survive?

He has no idea, but this at least is a question he wants answered.

“Are you sure?” Hannibal asks, and that’s fair, Will is hyperventilating and shaking and he might float away and he is *perfect*. The lingering unreality only heightens his need. He’s not sure he remembers how to speak. “Will, are you okay? Are you with me?”

“*Yes*,” he says again, and he can hear the growl, the feral demand. Sees how Hannibal’s eyes dilate in response.

You sure about this? Since you’re still not sure what’s real and what isn’t? And you spent a day on the floor, and another sedated so you wouldn’t hurt yourself? Is this really the time to make major, life-changing decisions?

Yes, it is. It is the exact right time. He can feel it in his veins. He wants to go *now*.

“What about you?” he says, and his voice already sounds far away, like it left without him. “Your job, your life—”

“Is yours,” Hannibal interrupts. “Everything I am, everything I have, is yours. I have restarted many times, I can do it again. I wouldn’t mind a little less police scrutiny either, but I’m not picky. Wherever you are is where I belong.”

Will’s eyes flutter closed on a sigh that’s more like a moan. Everything Hannibal is saying is true. He can feel that, too. The raw and bleeding open wounds where truth lives.

He remembers. That first night, when he’d asked about Lithuanian. How Hannibal said being with him felt like he’d finally found his way home.

Me, too. Just took a little longer for me to get there.

“What did I ever do to deserve you,” he asks, sighs. Eyes half-open and blurry. He tries to reach out to Hannibal, lands one of his hands on one of his, squeezes so tightly he can feel the bones moving beneath his fingers. Hannibal doesn’t so much as flinch, doesn’t pull away at all. Squeezes back.

“I’ve been asking myself that question about you since we met,” Hannibal says softly, and Will sighs again, a little moaning, a little whining. “You’re certain? About leaving?”

“God, yes,” he says, forces Hannibal back into focus, so there can be no misunderstanding. “Please, Hannibal. Take me away.” He remembers another fragment, the sound of the dam letting go, the flood in the spill. “Do whatever you want with me. I trust you.”

Hannibal seems to sway towards him, and Will sits up a little straighter, leans forward instead of away. Hannibal’s hand comes up to cup his face, slide back into his hair, twist tightly. He cries out, but this is so much different from the pain and terror when he was still downstairs, this is *possession*, and yes, Will is possessed, and with the intrusion is purified and reformed around his new, bigger, better self.

“Tomorrow,” Hannibal says, so close Will can feel his breath on his lips. “We’ll plan tomorrow, leave tomorrow.” *If you still want to go then, after you wake up, when you’re more lucid*.

“Tomorrow,” Will agrees, “because tonight I want you to fuck me, and also make me something to eat.” Hannibal’s eyes fly open in surprise, and Will finds himself actually *smiling*, who would’ve thought. “Okay. I’m going to say this once, because I resent you trying to make the world real when you’re so good at making the golden clouds. Like spun sugar.” He hears himself, wonders if there was something more than a muscle relaxant in the IV. Another reason for Hannibal to want to wait. *Stupid boy*, he thinks fondly.

“My name is Will Graham,” he says. “I’m in Wolf Trap, Virginia, in bed with the love of my life. I don’t know what time it is, but I know who I am, and I know who you are. I’m coming out of a semi-psychotic break brought on by the cicada bloom this year, which triggered what I assume is an acute post-traumatic stress response, although I haven’t been formally diagnosed. The specifics of reality are still a little shimmery, swimmy, but the specifics of us

are my stability. I don't want to be here anymore. This isn't our home, it's my house, and your room. I want a home with you. I've never—" His voice breaks, and he clears his throat, determined to finish. "I haven't had a home before. Please, please, take me home, Hannibal. Please."

The look of adoration on Hannibal's face is so open and complete that Will feels tears prick at the corners of his eyes. This, this is better than sleeping Hannibal or resting Hannibal. Will has never seen him so happy, so unencumbered. Hadn't thought it was possible.

Because of me, he thinks in awe. Strokes Hannibal's face.

"Yes," Hannibal says again, and descends on him. Will moans gratefully, draping his arms around Hannibal's neck, kissing him back messy and greedy. This is the best defense against the cicadas and the receding bayou, the only one that worked—burying himself in Hannibal until he doesn't have to exist outside of him.

That's going to be your entire life. Every moment of every day. Forever.

He whines, high and needy into Hannibal's mouth, who returns it with a grateful moan. He's dizzy but Hannibal has him. He's careening, blinded, but Hannibal has him. He keeps trying to float away, but Hannibal has him.

Hannibal has him.

"Han—" Will gasps, digging his fingers into Hannibal's biceps, bracketing his shoulders, rolls his hips up and moans brokenly. Pathetically. He has never been less ungrateful than he is in this moment. It tastes like freedom. His breath stutters as he ruts erratically against Hannibal. "I'm—"

"*Mine*," Hannibal groans, and Will comes, shaking and gasping and spilling onto Hannibal's pants—*jogging pants*—and shirt. His world has narrowed to their bed, and in this place, he knows what's real. Hannibal is real, and nothing else matters.

"Yours," Will sighs, carding his hands through Hannibal's hair. The most divine softness, and his to touch. He's floating and grounded and safe and he loves it. Wants it forever.

Has it forever.

"Winston, too," he says, mind drifting pleasantly. Hannibal makes a confused choking sound, and Will smiles. "Alana will find the pack good homes, but Winston comes with us."

Hannibal whimpers, managing frustrated and broken at once. It's lovely. "Alright. Will—"

"Can we go somewhere warm?" he asks, not particularly expecting an answer. "Warm and dry. No more swamps."

"Of course, but *Will*—"

"Arid," he says, proud of himself for coming up with the right word.

Hannibal groans again, shifts his hips, his erection digging painfully into Will's thigh. "Will, *please*."

He delights in his desperation, is always so easy for begging. He's still wrapped in bliss, figuratively and the weight of Hannibal on him. Focusing is difficult. "Yes, my love?"

Another groan, muffled against Will's shoulder, as his hips shift, and Will rocks up to meet him. Hannibal cries out, grinds down against Will.

"May I fuck you?" Hannibal asks, his accent thick and heavy, at odds with how quiet and ruined he is. "Please, you—you asked me to."

Will marvels at how far gone Hannibal is, how his vocabulary is down to almost nothing, and he's still dressed. Will is light and air and clouds, above it all, and Hannibal is the falcon riding his currents, rain drenching the Mojave Desert and Will is the superbloom in his wake, they are rapids and lazy streams.

This is my home, he thinks.

"Yes," he breathes. "Yes, please. Whatever you want. God, you're beautiful."

The noise Hannibal makes is exactly the same as when Will tightens his fingers around his neck, shifting from playful to cutting off his oxygen. Will carefully files the information away for later consideration, to make a stringboard and determine the precise series of events that need to take place so he can hear it again.

"Don't move," Hannibal murmurs into his ear, hot and breathy, and Will is so distracted he almost doesn't notice Hannibal disentangling himself and standing—a little shakily, Will is amazed to see.

"Hey," he says indignantly, but he can't stop watching Hannibal's shaking hands unbutton his pants and pull them down, kick them off, shaking fingers unbuttoning his shirt and shrugging out of it, how his entire body is trembling. He's not stopping to fold anything, either. Or put his dirty clothes in the hamper. He leaves them where they fall, and with shaking hands, starts going through the nightstand. Who is mesmerized, and impatient. "What're you doing? Come back."

"Lube," Hannibal says distractedly.

Will laughs. "We don't need it, get back here."

Hannibal takes a deep breath, closes his eyes for a moment, and finds the tube and tosses it onto the bed.

"I don't want to hurt you," Hannibal says, finally climbing back onto Will, kissing him deeply before sitting up and settling between his legs. Will spreads his knees obediently, feet flat and tucked against Hannibal's (*shaking*) thighs. "And I'm not feeling patient, *mylimasis*."

Will whimpers, cants his hips up. "Then hurry up, and I want as little as possible. You can take your time when you're inside me."

Hannibal finally stops, the cap popped but not yet squeezed, looks at Will, who is overcome. He is golden, iridescent, bioluminescent. He is energy and potential and danger and safety. He is love and he is home.

“Are you sure?”

Will nods. “Please. I only need you.” Hannibal’s eyes flutter, and he drops the lube onto the floor as well. Good, Will loves it when he’s gone enough that he’s messy. And if they’re really leaving tomorrow, why not trash the place. Or at least not clean up after themselves. He reaches up to stroke Hannibal’s cheek, reassure him, and finds his wrist captured, twisting uncomfortably as Hannibal frowns. “That’s not what I—”

“You said you took out the IV,” Hannibal says, glaring Will quiet. “You didn’t mention the condition you left yourself in.”

“What—”

Hannibal holds Will’s hand up, and he sees the bruise spreading beneath the puncture mark, which is still dribbling blood, Will suspects from Hannibal’s rough treatment, but he keeps that to himself.

“So?” he asks, trying to pull himself free, failing. “Come on, you’ve done worse than that.” This was the wrong thing to say, Will realizes immediately. He stops fighting, stops trying to convince him otherwise, as Hannibal’s face first clouds over and then into stormy, faux-neutral. “Hannibal—”

“Don’t move,” he says again, and the words couldn’t be more different. Cold and clinical, followed by the same pulling away, leaving-of-bed.

“No,” Will says sharply, pushing himself up on one elbow, trying to get better purchase, is frantic in his panic. “Don’t go, I didn’t mean—”

“Don’t talk,” Hannibal snaps, and Will is shocked into silence. He kneels on the floor, and for the first time Will sees his doctors bag next to the IV. He watches Hannibal get alcohol wipes, gauze, medical tape. It’s all entirely unnecessary—

Ingrate.

He sucks in a breath. No, he hadn’t meant it like that, it was just an IV, he genuinely did not need medical attention. He needed Hannibal back in bed, back between his legs, back to looking like he was in a dream and not the constant grinding nightmare of reality. He lets Hannibal tend to him, winces at the alcohol wipes, at how Hannibal isn’t as gentle with him as he usually is.

“What’s happening?” Will asks softly. He’s trying not to panic, trying not to feel the promise of *home* slipping away. He tentatively rests his free hand on Hannibal’s shoulder, and while he isn’t shaken off, he doesn’t feel welcome. He doesn’t retreat, is too terrified of what will happen if he gives even an inch.

Hannibal doesn't answer, finishing the bandage in silence. It's much more elaborate than it needs to be, wrapping around his palm several times when all he needed was a bandaid at most, but he doesn't care. Only wants Hannibal back.

"Han, please."

Hannibal sighs, and Will feels the entire universe on his exhale. Hannibal moves closer, rests his head on the bed, forehead pressing against Will's thigh.

"I was so worried."

He doesn't understand. "About the IV?"

Hannibal huffs, his *how are you so smart and yet so stupid* noise of irritation that would normally grate on him but instead sounds comfortingly familiar. Normal. Not catastrophic.

"About you, Will. I thought you were dead. I thought I'd left you alone, and—." He cuts off, and Will doesn't feel like he has the right to speak, so he doesn't. He's acutely aware of his own come drying on his stomach, and how neither of them are hard.

Slipping. You knew it was only a matter of time until he slipped away.

Oh come on, take some responsibility. He's not doing anything, you're pushing him, kicking his unconscious corpse out of the bed. Literally, he's on his knees on the floor for you. You're fragile*, Will. You take so much time and effort to maintain, and for what? So you can fall apart the second you're alone? And now you want* more*. You want to be swept off your feet, you demand a home and a life from this man who has already given you everything, when you can't even keep yourself alive?*

Pathetic. Ingrate. Worse than useless.

"I can't lose you," Hannibal says, broken, and Will is rent into a thousand pieces alongside him. "You wondered if we could survive a separation. I know I cannot. I tried, before you chose me. It doesn't work."

Before he chose Hannibal? What the fuck?

"I didn't choose you," Will says, immediately hears it. "Then, I mean. Before us. You broke down the door to my burning house and you saved me. I couldn't choose you anymore than I can choose to stop breathing, and I've tried to do that, so don't get clever. I was already there, you just. Came and got me."

"I won't live without you," Hannibal says, and Will wonders if he heard anything he'd said. He looks up, and Will is caught in the fury of his gaze. "Do not try to make me."

Will shakes his head, licks his lips, squeezes Hannibal's shoulder as he gathers his thoughts, puts his words in order.

"It wasn't you," he says eventually. "Or your absence, that was bad timing. Like before, it wasn't because of you, the lack just made it worse. I've never liked the cicadas, but there's

multiple broods this year, some confluence of periodical Pharaohs, and it's been—bad. Hard. You are my stability, Hannibal. It's easier when you're here. But I've lived through half a lifetime of late springs and early summers, and I've survived them all. It might not be pretty, but. I'm here. Ugly and scarred and broken, but here. I don't want to try to live without you, either, but…" He feels Hannibal tense, wishes he hadn't said anything. "If I'm too—too worrying, I understand, you aren't obligated to stay."

Why the fuck not, he was dying anyway, talking like that. Killing himself as surely as slitting his wrists.

Hannibal's eyes flash, darken. A summer storm, hot and muggy, and then blessedly clear. Cool, breathable. On the other side.

"Aren't I?" Hannibal asks lowly. "The way rain is obligated to fall, and thunder to crash, and lightning to strike."

Oh fuck, fuck, he can feel their very real physical connection, one mycelium reaching out and attaching to another, neurons rewiring, palaces rearranging, mirroring thoughts echoing and *growing* like vines, like underground colonies. His ears are ringing.

"The way I'm obligated to love you," he says, but that's not enough. "And to find my way back to you when I get lost. But it would be a privilege to run away with you, not an obligation. An honor. Something I didn't know existed until you, a higher level of consciousness."

Hannibal groans softly, and Will's eyes flutter, absentmindedly stroking Hannibal's neck. Feeling the solidity of his reality, the only one in which he's ever wanted to stay. Wondering if this is it, the last time, if he's finally fucked them up beyond repair.

Outside, the cicadas sing.

"Promise me," Hannibal demands, and for a second Will thinks he missed the directive, teetering on the edge of panic, until Hannibal speaks again. "You won't ever do anything to hasten your death."

Instead, he manages a shaky but real smile. "Han. I kill people, for fun. With you, and because of you, and for you. We don't exactly live a low-risk lifestyle."

His eyes soften, just a little, and Will's heart soars. *I can make it better, too. Not just worse.*

"You know what I mean," Hannibal says, and the affection is back, underneath the fear disguised as anger.

And I can scare him. Which shouldn't be sexy, but is.

"I promise not to do anything you wouldn't," Will says, because it's fair, and because he knows it's a promise he can keep. They don't use empty words, especially not when reality is tenuous and the future so nebulous. "If you promise not to blame yourself for my mental illnesses." He pauses. "The ones you didn't cause, I mean."

Hannibal smiles, small and coy. “I’ll do my best.”

“Then come back to bed?” Will asks, hearing his hesitation. It’s better, yes. But not wholly gone, and he’s not sure he can take another refusal now, no matter how minor. “Please.”

“Mm, I don’t know,” Hannibal says slowly, and Will groans. It’s not uncommon for Hannibal to tease him after a bad night or series of nights, be simultaneously more submissive and dominating; Will is almost certain he does it to check in, be absolutely certain of Will’s consent, give him plenty of time to back out, and usually he appreciates it. Doesn’t take him up on it, but appreciates it nonetheless. Right now, tonight, this night—this *holy night*, he will forever celebrate the holiday of their escape—he doesn’t want to wait. Isn’t feeling particularly patient. Apparently neither is Hannibal, or maybe he sees the need on Will’s face and, miraculously, wants nothing more than to give him exactly what he needs, because he asks, “Will I finally be allowed to fuck you?”

Will shivers, and the room shimmers along with him. No swamps this time, only the gentle gold Hannibal brings with him, tinting his clouds warm and safe. “I think you’ve waited long enough.”

Hannibal rises, and Will rolls onto his back, legs spread, and Hannibal is back between his knees, leaning over him, overlong his mouth with his and aligning their bodies, touching from toe to his hand on the top of Will’s head, buried in his hair. *Like mycelia*, Will thinks. He lets out a sharp gasp when Hannibal reaches between them, drags his leaking cock across Will’s hole, over and over, catching but never sliding in. Will isn’t sure if it’s meant to be torture or foreplay, only knows that Hannibal is ignoring his increasingly desperate wiggling, lifting, *inviting*, and he is going to die after all.

“Hannibal…”

“Shh,” he says gently, barely starts to push in, the hint of pressure, and Will whines. “You already came, Will. It’s my turn.”

Will doesn’t want to know how serious Hannibal is. He takes great joy in edging Will, when he’s feeling patient, but that doesn’t seem like tonight. There have been a handful of occasions where Will hadn’t been allowed to come until the next morning, and one particularly torturous long weekend (one particularly *sublime* long weekend, but he’d be taking that to the grave), but never when they were so raw.

Or so daring, with the world opening around them like a late-blooming flower finally blossoming, and the current between them, in the air around them, anything was possible.

Including denial.

“Relax,” Hannibal says, amused. Rubs his free hand along the outside of his thigh reassuringly, and Will realizes he never stopped whining, only got increasingly desperate, higher and breathier and needier. “We have forever, the rest of our lives. I’ll get to you soon enough.”

“Please don’t make me wait forever,” Will says quietly, making sure he isn’t begging, sounds more broken than if he had. He sounds *real*, he’s not used to being the real one. Isn’t sure how he feels about it.

Hannibal smiles down at him. “No, *mylimasis*, I wouldn’t dream of it. I was merely making sure you’re wet enough to take me.”

Will whines again. Seems to be the only sound he can make. “Yes, please.”

“Mm,” Hannibal hums noncommittally. “I ought to check, I don’t want to hurt you.”

Will feels the tip of a finger settle against his hole, groans, arching up. “You’re not going to hurt me.”

“I know,” Hannibal says, and slips his finger inside. Will bites his lower lip to keep from saying something rude and guaranteeing himself a very unhappy ending, lets Hannibal tease him with slow and shallow thrusts, stretching him so leisurely Will isn’t at all sure it won’t be forever before Hannibal was inside of him. “I’m being very careful,” he says as he adds a second finger, and Will groans again. He’s moving even slower, there’s hardly any friction at all, just the maddening tease of being not full enough.

“You don’t—don’t have to,” Will says again, stammers when Hannibal brushes his prostate, finally, for the first time. The touch is gone as soon as he felt it, and he whines, clenches around two whole fingers, trying to make them feel like more.

“*Somebody* has to,” Hannibal replies, and the lecture in his tone makes Will’s cock twitch. “Since you’re evidently not up to the task.”

Will doesn’t know how to respond, to the loving degradation, the gift of Hannibal’s care, his own ineptitude. He thinks—thinks he might like it. For tonight only. Possibly for other nights, individually, when he needs it. Especially if he doesn’t have to say the words out loud.

Which is why he says, “I think you’re the first person who’s ever taken care of me.”

Hannibal stops, his (*two*) fingers buried up to his knuckles in Will, regards him. Will can’t breathe, accidentally made eye contact, can’t look away. He doesn’t know what they’re waiting for, what more he can give, Hannibal has it all already. Deliberately, he curls his fingers, and Will’s eyes flutter closed on a groan, flexing up, precome dripping onto his abdomen. There’s no other movement, nothing that might be satisfying, only the steady petting of Hannibal’s first and middle fingers against his prostate. He has no idea how long this goes on for, unrelenting, he’s almost worried he won’t be able to come again, with the amount he’s leaking. But only almost, because Hannibal is taking care of him, and he is safe.

“And the last,” Hannibal says. It’s been so long Will has to work to remember what they were talking about. His mind has almost completely departed, faded into cotton candy clouds. When the meaning finally finds him, he lets out a breathless moan. It shouldn’t be arousing, shouldn’t feel like home, to know that nobody else will be allowed to care for or about him again, but lying is pointless when Hannibal can feel everything, is a human lie detector.

“Yes,” Will sighs. He wonders if he’ll come like this. It almost doesn’t matter. Almost. “Please.”

“You never need to ask,” Hannibal says, and for a second Will thinks he’s going to get what he wants when Hannibal pulls out, then groans as he pushes back in with three fingers. “I’m always here for you.”

“H-Han,” he gasps, twisting the sheet in a weak fist. “‘T’s not what I meant.”

“I know what you mean,” Hannibal says soothingly, continuing his extraordinarily slow exploration of Will’s body, like there was a single atom he didn’t already know. “I know how to take care of you, Will. There’s no need to fret.”

He whimpers, squeezing his eyes closed, trying to catch his breath, he’s dizzy with hyperventilation. He’s getting close, again, doesn’t want to come without Hannibal inside him, again.

“Please fuck me,” he whispers, feels a few hot, embarrassed tears trickle down his face. “Please, I’m going to come, please.”

“That’s the goal, darling,” Hannibal says, still so kindly, and not at all like he’s planning on spending the rest of his life doing this and nothing else. “Are you ready to come for me again? Show me how much you love when I take care of you, Will. Come for me.”

Will groans, broken. He feels the *snap* of his sanity coming undone, unfurling into something raw and open and beautiful and agonizing. His cock twitches painfully, untouched, too hard for how soon it is, and then he’s spilling the little he has, dribbling down his cock, coating himself in stickiness. He’s gasping, desperate for air, overheating, sweating and shaking, and Hannibal’s fingers are *still opening him up*, like he has any tension left in his body, any ability to resist whatever Hannibal wants to do with him.

“Stop,” Will manages, tries to twist away from his touch, can’t move. “Hannibal. I can’t—” He sobs wretchedly when his prostate is targeted again, all three fingers stroking so perfectly, he feels like sandpaper and cheese graters and unbearable, inhuman pleasure. “Please. Stop.”

He stills, and Will supposes that’s the best he can hope for at this point. “Color?”

Will whimpers. Debates giving up.

Not tonight.

No, not tonight. But he doesn’t want to die, either, or be too broken to travel in the morning.

“Chartreuse.”

Hannibal wraps a hand around his cock, and Will screams, bucking up beneath him, anything to free himself. He isn’t allowed more than an inch or two, which only gives him more room to struggle. He’s chanting, begging, one word over and over again. *Stop stop stop please stop stop*.

“You have three colors,” Hannibal says sharply, and fine, Will gets it, he’s already nodding, sweat-soaked hair flopping into his face. “What is your color?”

“Green,” Will sobs. “Fuck, Hannibal, green, can you just—”

“Yes, Will,” he says, and mercifully lets him go. Will gasps in deep breaths while he has the chance, trembling. “I’ll give you everything you need.” He finally takes his other hand back as well, and Will is simultaneously bereft from the sudden lack of contact and deeply, desperately grateful for the time to gather himself.

He should have known better.

Hannibal is leaning over him, eclipsing everything that isn’t himself, again rubbing the head of his cock against Will’s entrance, and he whines, flinching away and also somehow forward, asking for more while begging for at least a breather. Now, however, he’s open and loose, and Hannibal catches and slides in easily.

Will can’t breathe. Has never breathed. He realizes vaguely Hannibal is giving him a minute, just his head, to adjust, but by the time it registers, he’s moving again. He’s sobbing, shaking, jerking uncontrollably, and Hannibal keeps going, inexorably, until he’s fully seated.

“Will?”

He keens, arching up violently, like his name is an electric current. He hears Hannibal groan, deep and rumbling between them, and one day, he’ll be proud of how ruined he sounds. Now, Will is too busy being destroyed to fully appreciate Hannibal’s fall.

“C-color.”

The idea that he could speak is absurd. He tries, though. In case staying silent meant Hannibal really would stop, because he thinks his world might end if he stopped. Or kept going.

“*Ggggrrehh*,” he slurs, feels Hannibal’s head drop to his neck, covering his skin in wet, messy kisses and long licks and lingering bites. Will sighs breathily, trying to force his body to adjust to so *much*, when he was still so used to nothing. He’s having trouble with adjectives, descriptors, for what Hannibal is doing to him.

He feels peeled, skinned alive, all of his nerve endings firing at once. He is overused and overstimulated, overstretched and overcome. He feels pleasure at the very outer edges of his periphery, like his body knows that it should be enveloped in bliss, and hasn’t yet caught up to the stabbing burn of his prostate and rim, his cock only fairing slightly better with no direct contact. It keeps *trying* to fill out, again, for a third time, he physically cannot become hard, so why can’t he *relax* and let Hannibal take him, why is his body so fucking *desperate* to do whatever Hannibal wants from him.

Ask a stupid question, get a stupid answer.

“You feel so good,” Hannibal whispers, and he sounds awed, like it’s his first time. “Oh, Will.” He keens again at his name, can’t explain how it tears him apart. “You’re…”

The praise is making him heady. It occurs to him that the sooner Hannibal comes, the sooner this will be over and he can finally rest. Have Hannibal cook for him, he’s not sure when he last ate, but even that is secondary to the visceral need to regrow his skin, wrap himself in fleece until his nerve endings are no longer exposed, maybe never have sex again.

…probably not that one.

Will remembers his plan again, prepares himself. *Just let it wash over you*, he thinks, and clenches hard around Hannibal. It’s agony and such a relief, the squeeze lessening the stretch, if only for a moment. He’s panting hard at the effort, at survival, and Hannibal—

Hannibal *becomes*.

The sound he makes is utterly inhuman, a lupine howl doubled over the bone-deep growl of grizzly bears, and Will whines alongside him, insignificant and inaudible, the only sound he can make. Hannibal pushes himself up onto his elbows, pulls back enough to catch Will’s eyes, too dazed to dodge such an attack. There has never been a darkness so deep, so dangerous, so desperate. Will can’t breathe again, if he ever could. He’s drowning and it’s perfect, exactly what he wants.

“Just one more,” Hannibal says, breathy but gentle, reassuring, and before Will can figure out why it feels like a trap, Hannibal pulls out, all the way, gives Will just long enough to register the relief, and fucks back in. Will screams, writhing beneath him, and any hope of any conscious efforts on his part vanish as Hannibal pounds into him, over and over, unrelenting. He’s been torn apart, fucked in half, he is nothing but sensation crumbling away beneath the onslaught. He thinks he might be dying, thinks so again when Hannibal changes the angle, once again targeting his prostate. He moans weakly, his blood vibrating like he’s been electrocuted.

“H-Hahhhnn.” It’s barely a sound, Will should be embarrassed. He can’t be anything, everything hurts, his bone marrow has liquified into molten lava, he’s going to die.

“You’re doing so well,” Hannibal pants into his ear, and Will keens. Thinks Hannibal must be close, the way he sounds. He needs him to come—*needs* it, now, because if Hannibal keeps going like this, he’s terrified he might actually come again.

Just one more.

Will panics. Flails, which makes it so much worse. His cock, still soft, is caught between their stomachs, inconsistent stimulation that usually wouldn’t be enough now excruciating, agonizing, like someone shoved a sparkler up his dick. He wants to say no, can’t make his mouth work, which is ironic because he’s pretty sure every cell of his body is screaming.

“It’s okay,” Hannibal says, and Will sobs, burying his face in Hannibal’s neck, like he can hide from him in him. Like a mouse that tries to hide in a cat bed. “You’re okay, Will, you can do this. *Fuck*, you’re so good for me, I know you’ll be good.”

Will is death. He has become death. He thinks he might be almost screaming with every thrust, he thinks he is melting, turning to liquid, he thinks there is absolutely nothing he wants than to be good, to be so *so good* for Hannibal. More than he has ever wanted anything, more than he wants to never be touched again, more than he wants to spend the rest of his life with Hannibal, he wants to be good.

He knows red and he knows three taps, and he knows he could manage, if he really needs it. It would be a relief.

Being good would be better.

"Please," he says, voice hoarse, sludgy. He knew he could talk if it was important. "Help."

Hannibal groans, low and broken, and Will shakes. He slams home, grinds himself deep, forces himself to his knees and unhooks Will's legs from around his waist, bends them up instead, practically folding Will in half. He's going to die, Hannibal is so deep, impossibly deep, and then Hannibal once again takes his cock in hand and it's way too much, still, again, his come has mostly dried so there's not much to slick the way, he is *on fire*, he was wrong, he can't do this, it's going to kill him.

"*Mano tobulas meile, prašau. Parodyk man*."

Will's Lithuanian isn't great. Is pretty fucking awful, actually, but he's had success with a few phrases here and there. Ones Hannibal says a lot, because he knows what it does to him.

My perfect love, please. And then something he doesn't know. He doesn't need to.

He screams as he comes, clenching down so tightly around Hannibal it hurts, his cock soft and dry and still somehow spasming in Hannibal's hand. His prostate feels like an open wound, and all he can do is pray that Hannibal is close. That he might, one day, find respite.

"Please," he says again, he doesn't know how he keeps saying it. His voice sounds very far away, and he doesn't think he's going to be conscious for very much longer. "Han. *Please*." He wants to say that he's been good, done everything Hannibal wanted, deserves his reward, but there are too many words, and too many of them polysyllabic. "Fill me."

Embarrassing.

Except that Hannibal *does*, with a low growl, deep and perfect. Will whimpers, unable to keep his body from responding, his hips from thrusting up to meet Hannibal's, and Hannibal. Just lies on him, continuing to slowly fuck his come deeper inside Will for as long as he can, like every movement, every touch isn't torture. Will doesn't try to fight it, knows he can't. Doesn't really want to. He did it, he was good for Hannibal, he has earned his rest. He can relax unencumbered, sure of himself and his place in Hannibal's arms. Has already started to drift off when Hannibal rolls off him, immediately covers him with the extra large fleece blanket that keeps *too much* away. He hums quietly, thankful, too exhausted to make more coherent sound.

“Rest,” Hannibal murmurs, kisses his forehead. Will lets out a quiet, indignant cry, and Hannibal laughs softly, kisses his lips as well. Even that is too much—likely why he hadn’t done it—but it’s worth it to fall asleep with the taste of Hannibal on his mouth. “Do you want anything specific to eat?”

“Nnm,” Will mumbles, earning himself another chuckle and a hand carding through his hair. It triggers a full body shiver, and he moans quietly, flinching away.

“Apologies,” Hannibal says, though he doesn’t sound particularly sorry. “I’ll see what we have.” There’s a pause, Will almost misses it in his haze, but the tension always finds a way through.

“What?” he asks, praying it’s the last word he’ll have to speak tonight.

“Are you sure—”

You have got to be fucking kidding me.

“Stop,” Will mumbles, tries to sound authoritative, mostly sounds like he has marbles in his mouth. “Out. Go, cook.”

The briefest hesitation. “So that’s a yes?”

Will groans. Tries to roll over, absolutely cannot. “Go ‘way, lemme sleep.”

Hannibal steals a final kiss before going downstairs, and Will sinks into a blessedly dreamless sleep, one so deep not even the cicadas can reach him.

6

“Did you send the text?”

Will hesitates. “Almost.”

Hannibal sighs, and for the first time he hears genuine annoyance. He understands, is pretty fucking stressed himself, but it has to be just right. Can’t be alarmist, can’t sound like they aren’t coming back.

He doesn’t know how to justify bringing Winston on a last-minute vacation to Paris when he’ll be back in four or five days, a week at the most. There’s no reason for the extra hassle, and none of the other dogs are coming. (Will has already taken the time with each of them to say goodbye, they all have their own folders up in his office, on his desk where Alana has no reason to go. Medical records, histories, any special needs, all carefully catalogued for her to find in a week or two. She’ll find them good homes, he isn’t worried, not about that.) Everything he tries sounds awkward and blatantly untrue if not outright ridiculous; *W: Hannibal’s taking me to Paris for a couple’s getaway, and also our dog. W: Last minute trip to Paris, I think he’s going to propose, I don’t want Winston to miss the big moment. Especially if we decide to elope, he deserves a honeymoon, too. W: Winston got into Westminster, and Hannibal and I are going to support him. Also, Westminster is in Paris this year.*

Will yelps when Hannibal grabs his phone, stares at him indignantly. “Give it back.”

He raises an eyebrow. “Westminster, really?”

“You think of something, then,” Will says moodily, perches on the edge of his armchair, pretending he’s sitting and not about to get up and go back to pacing. Winston noses at his hand, and Will scratches his ears, smiling softly. He was worth the trouble.

“Here,” Hannibal says, handing his phone back. “Do you have your passport?”

“Yes,” Will replies dutifully. He’s quadruple checked Winston’s paperwork is in order, it’s probably a good thing Hannibal is in charge of the human identification. He pulls up his message thread with Alana, is distracted by Hannibal, again. His phone buzzes repeatedly as he’s grilled.

“The letter is on the desk?”

“Yes, it’s with the—”

“The dogs’ profiles, yes, I remember. Euros?”

Will rolls his eyes. Hannibal had insisted on getting cash here, early this morning while Will dozed and Hannibal plotted, because the exchange rate was better. “Yes. Two hundred each in our wallets, five grand in my suitcase, and another fifteen in yours.”

Hannibal frowns. “Why do I get more?”

“Because your suitcase is bigger,” Will says slowly, enjoying Hannibal’s flush. Sure, he might’ve been the one crying and begging last night, but with Hannibal’s fretting, he has some measure of control back. He feels calm. Relaxed. This is the easy leg of their journey, the one that really could just be a last minute trip to Paris. “Alana wrote back, hang on.”

W: Hannibal surprised me with a trip to Paris, and since he’s paying we’re taking Winston, in case it gets too overwhelming. Would you mind stopping in and checking on the dogs for a couple days? I’m not sure when we’re getting back, Hannibal is keeping as much of the trip a surprise as he can, but he says we’ll be back in time for work a week from Monday. I’ll have Hannibal pick out a nice bottle of wine for you as payment, promise.
A: Not a problem, sounds like exactly what you need.
A: You guys are cute. It’s good. Good for both of you.
A: I don’t know how to say this over text without sounding sarcastic, so just know I’m being 100% sincere when I say I hope you’re happy. You deserve it.

Will is surprised to feel his heart twist. Hannibal’s imitation was good, maybe too good; he wasn’t at all sure that Alana didn’t suspect something. Maybe not that they were never coming back, but that they might be more than he’d suggested. Or maybe she really did think they were going to elope, and it wasn’t *untrue*, it’s a type of elopement, of a sort.

W: Thanks. And, because that didn’t come close to being enough, *W: For everything.* Still not enough, but. It wouldn’t do to tip their hand so early.

“You’re absolutely certain this is what you want?”

Will smiles to himself. He should tell Hannibal how reassuring he finds his insecurities, how it makes him feel less broken and more loved, but he’s afraid if he says anything, he’ll stop. View it as a weakness, or something that Will doesn’t need to worry himself with. Maybe one day.

“*Taip, mažiau.*”

Hannibal makes a noise somewhere between a groan and a growl, and Will’s smile grows, becomes more of a smirk. Underneath the excitement and overall insanity of what they’re doing, he’s still shy about the day before, thinks there’s still a conversation that needs to be had, but the initial mutual reassurances makes it easier to set aside for another time. Seeing Hannibal even a fraction as desperate as he’d been does wonders for his dignity.

“I’m going to pack the car,” Hannibal says, and Winston perks up at the word *car*. “How much longer do you need?”

Will raises his eyebrows. “I’ve been ready to go for hours.”

Hannibal glares at him, and he sighs dramatically. “Okay, since you texted Alana.”

“For you,” Hannibal reminds him needlessly, grabs their suitcases, and heads outside, Winston at his heels.

Will’s phone buzzes in his hands.

A: Well if you’re thanking me for everything, I’m afraid that’ll cost you a bottle of not just any wine but champagne. The good stuff, alright? Don’t let him get smart with me, I can tell the difference between duty-free and direct from vineyard to Virginia.

He grins. It’s a shame their next communication will be over international headlines, and not for months.

W: I’ll have it airmailed so you can see the return address for yourself.

And not because he wouldn’t be coming back. No, not at all.

Hannibal opens the front door, looks around, lands his gaze on Will. “Are you ready?”

“Yeah,” he says, powers off his phone, and tucks it into his little carryon backpack along with his documents and, primarily, dog supplies. Will stands, looks around, waiting to feel something. In truth, aside from the dogs and the rug, he’s past ready. Can’t fucking wait to be gone. “The rug—”

“Is taken care of,” Hannibal says for what must’ve been the fiftieth time that day. “Once our permanent disappearance is confirmed but before Jack Crawford can get a warrant and have his men dismantle your cabin, my friend will collect it. I will contact them when we’re settled and have it shipped anonymously.”

Will nods, turns to Hannibal. “I think that’s it, then.”

Hannibal smiles, holds the door open a little wider. “Let’s go, *mylimasis*. Our chariot awaits.”

He snorts, knocks his shoulder against Hannibal’s as he passes him in the doorway. “You’re ridiculous.”

“Perhaps,” he allows, taking Will’s arm for the twenty foot walk to his Bentley. “But I booked us a private jet, and the captain says we’ll be flying in the *Chariot*. It seems planes, like boats, have names.”

Will is still stuck on the words *private jet*, almost walks into the SUV as a result. This time Hannibal snickers, asks, “Do you need assistance boarding the car?”

He rolls his eyes, gets in on his own. Winston is in the back seat; a very rare treat, Hannibal prefers to keep the dogs out of his Bentley. Then he remembers this is the car’s final voyage, at least as theirs. They’ll leave it in long term parking where it won’t bother anyone, and then —

Their chariot awaits.

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